

Participation and conflict management for a sustainable and multiple use of the state forest in Gualaco, Olancho, Honduras.

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During the last decades social forestry, participation, decentralisation and community involvement became central topics in the development debate on the management of natural resources. There is a general conviction that participation is a condition to protect nature and to improve living conditions of the local people. But, there is still a need to face participation as a complex and non-automatic issue on the operational level of action. Complexity rises when the basic conditions to perform participation are not given. In addition, different interests of stakeholders can lead to conflicts, which often hamper the realisation of a multiple use of forests. The introduced M.Sc.-thesis is based on a case study which aims to identify and analyse constraints and potentials for participation in the management of the state forest in Gualaco, Honduras. The data was collected with qualitative and quantitative methods. Analytical instruments are based on literature review concerning conflict management, participation, collective action theory and common property regimes. The study identifies and analyses the most significant sociocultural characteristics of the stakeholders that are connected to the particular material context constituted by the forest. Irregularities within the forest administration, a mono-functional forest use, a lack of efficiency in cultivation methods of smallholders and conflicts between different social actors proved to be main causes for the reduction of the forest cover. Local conflicts evolve from overlapping of formal and informal property rights, scarcity of resources and inequity in access to them, imbalance of power, corruption within the institutional framework and a particular socio-cultural pattern of interaction. In Gualaco, a view of the community as a heterogeneous entity with a dynamic hierarchy of social relations can help to develop feasible strategies for an improvement of the welfare of the community. Part of a modified strategy should be the creation of inclusive institutional spaces, the development of need-focused management plans and an increase in visibility of weaker actors. An effective participation requires the presence of basic conditions, if these are not encountered they must be created. Only if the prerequisites are fulfilled, participation can comply with its function to be a vehicle for sustainable development.